

Copper Coast Geopark awarded new UNESCO designation

Exciting things are happening, the Copper Coast Geopark has become a UNESCO Global Geopark, and now has the same status as a World Heritage Site.

In 1972 UNESCO signed the World Heritage Convention which paved the way for the establishment of a List of World Heritage Sites. A vote at the General Conference in Paris this week created a new site designation, the **UNESCO Global Geopark**. This new Listing was established to recognize the importance of geological heritage across the world.

The purpose of a Geopark is to explore, develop and celebrate the links between geological heritage and all other aspects of the areas natural, cultural and intangible heritages. They are about reconnecting human society at all levels to the planet we call home and to celebrate how our planets history has shaped every aspect of our lives and societies.

Geoparks try to bring benefit to the regional economy, primarily through the promotion of tourism, but they also have an important role in education and working with communities to build pride of place.

Ireland has three World Heritage sites Newgrange, Skellig Michael and the Giant's Causeway, and now it has three UNESCO Global Geoparks:- The Copper Coast Geopark, the oldest Geopark in Ireland, Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark and Marble Arch Caves Global.

Chairman Mike Sweeney says 'This remarkable achievement would not have been possible without the support of the communities within our boundary and the dedicated work of a small number of individuals. The Copper Coast Geopark covers an area of 90 sq. km. including the villages of Dunhill, Fenor, Boatstrand, Annestown, Bunmahon, Stradbally and Kill. We are a charity and a largely voluntary organisation and are most grateful for the help of FAS and TUS colleagues who have helped in recent years.'

We have come a long way since becoming the seventh Geopark in the world in 2001, and the movement has grown to almost 130 Geoparks throughout the world. Working with other Geoparks within the Geopark Network meant that the Copper Coast could participate in a number of InterReg projects (2004-14) which allowed a deepening understanding of the areas rich geological and industrial past and enrich this with the experience of others throughout Europe. Funds also allowed for the purchase and conservation of a number of key buildings notably the enginehouse at Tankardstown and old 'church' at Bunmahon and lots lots more – you will just have to visit us!

In 2011 we received a Leader grant and loan support from Clann Credo to refurbish and extend the ex church at Bunmahon which now acts as our headquarters and as a Visitor Centre housing a café, a craft shop and exhibition dedicated to the areas rich cultural and geological heritage. During the winter months the Centre reverts to community use but can also be used for private events including civil ceremonies (for bookings please contact Catherine Kavanagh, Retail Manager at 051 292828 or 087 6283211).

Our journey would not have been possible without the support of the Geological Survey of Ireland and the Council. The challenge now is how to use this new status and world famous brand to promote an appreciation and enjoyment of the rich heritage of the area and as a stimulus for economic growth within the Geopark area and the wider county.

Unfortunately our funding situation does not allow us to open during the winter months except for special events. Our next event is our Christmas fair on the 5th and 6th of December. Please come along it will give the opportunity to learn a little more about us and support local craftspeople who will have a number of stalls. We have decided that any income the Centre makes from this event will be donated to our colleagues in Lesvos Geopark to help with the humanitarian crisis swamping that small island.

Things to do in the Copper Coast Global Geopark:

There's lots to do even when our Visitor Centre is close; here are some of our favourites:

- Enjoy the beautiful Ann Valley walk (along a glaciated valley)
- Visit Dunhill Castle ruins, once home to the Power Clan (built on the remains of a volcano)
- Fenor with its spectacular angel sculpture, walk over a bog with its ever changing flora and fauna. Check out the magnificent sculpture, the Angel of Fenor in the grounds of the church yard
- Gaulstown dolmen is but part of the rich megalithic story of the area
- The beautiful village of Stradbally, where you can learn lots from it's sun dial in the village centre
- the historic village of Kill.
- Enjoy the coastal drive, but do pop into some of the coves and beaches, and learn about our geological past – Stradbally Cove, Ballyvooney Cove, Ballydowane Cove, Trá na mBó Cove, Stage Cove, Kilmurrin Cove, Bunmahon Beach, Boatstrand Harbour and Beach, Annestown Beach, Kilfarrasy Beach, and Garrarus Beach
- Tankardstown is the surface expression of an extensive mining complex that extended more than 300m underground and out under the sea.
- And lots more..... walking, cycling, or simply enjoy a picnic in one of our numerous viewing points with spectacular and panoramic views of this incredible coastline.

For more information on the following:

Copper Coast Global Geopark:- visit www.coppercoastgeopark.com

Global Network of Geoparks:- visit www.globalgeopark.org

UNESCO World Heritage Sites List:- <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>

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Notes to editor:

1. UNESCO was established in 1945 in order to respond to the firm belief that political and economic agreements are not enough to build a lasting peace. Peace must be established on the basis of humanity's moral and intellectual solidarity. UNESCO strives to build networks among nations that enable this kind of solidarity, by mobilizing for education: building intercultural understanding, pursuing scientific cooperation and protecting freedom of expression: an essential condition for democracy, development and human dignity. For more information see www.unesco.org
2. UNESCO Global Geopark status is a designation earned by unique regions worldwide. The status is awarded to special regions with outstanding geology that support sustainable development, research, education and cultural heritage by working with local communities and agencies. UNESCO Global Geoparks develop common-sense quality standards and provide a useful structure for cooperation and exchange between Geoparks around the world. This is especially useful for regions that combine the preservation of their natural landscape into effective ways of achieving strong local economic development, usually through nature-friendly tourism.
3. Copper Coast Geopark in Co. Waterford is named for the historic metal-mining industry, the legacies of which now constitute a tourist attraction. The area was declared a European Geopark in 2001 and a Global Geopark 2004. At 90 square kilometres the Copper Coast is about the smallest UNESCO Global Geopark. For more information see www.coppercoastgeopark.com. It tells the story of when north and south Ireland were thousands of kilometres apart and situated near the South Pole with lots of volcanic activity to when the area was covered in ice sheets and sea level was 120m lower than now. Bunmahon was home to a copper supermine employing up to 5000 people. Home to world renown artists, an award winning author of a dozen books and much more.
4. Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark is named after the Marble Arch Caves show caves in Co. Fermanagh. First established as a European Geopark in 2001, it now includes large parts of Co. Fermanagh in Northern Ireland and Co. Cavan in Ireland, and was the first cross-border Geopark in the world. For more information see www.marblearchcavesgeopark.com

5. Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark was the third Global Geopark in Ireland and received its status in 2011. The Geopark comprises the unique karst landscapes in Co. Clare and also includes the Cliffs of Moher dramatic sea cliffs and has a strong emphasis on local culture. For more information see www.burrengeopark.ie

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